

JOSE DE SAN MARTIN

Liberator of America



INSTITUTO NACIONAL SANMARTINIANO



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Generalissimo of the Republic of Peru and founder of its freedom. Liberator and General Captain of the Republic of Chile. Brigadier General of the Argentine Confederation. Liberator of Ecuador.



José de San Martín

Jose Francisco de San Martín was the son of Captain Don Juan de San Martín, born in Cervatos de la Cueva on February 3, 1728, and Doña Gregoria Matorras del Ser, who was born in Paredes de Nava on March 12, 1738. The two towns belonged to the Kingdom of Spain and were in the jurisdiction of Palencia, one of the provinces of Castilla la Vieja.

The Liberator ("El Libertador") was born on February 25, 1778 in Yapeyú, which presently forms part of the Argentine province of Corrientes. At the time of his birth, Yapeyú was the Capital of one of the four districts where the thirty villages of the Guaraní missions had gathered after the Jesuits had been expelled from that region by King Charles III in 1767. The Jesuits who had preached the gospel in the region and suffered martyrdom in many cases brought civilization to thousands of indians. As from 1775 Don Juan de San Martín carried out the functions of lieutenant governor. In 1781, the San Martín family, father, mother, four sons and one daughter, settled down in Buenos Aires. At the end of 1783; the entire family undertook a journey to Spain aboard the frigate Santa Balbina. They arrived at the port of Cadiz in late March, 1784. After completing his elementary education in Malaga in 1789, Jose de San Martín enlisted as a cadet in the Regiment of Murcia, in the infantry division.

While forming part of the Royal Spanish Army, garrison division, San Martín first fought in Africa against the Moors (Islamic Arabs who inhabited the north of that continent) and later on in Europe and neighboring seas, in ongoing wars with France, took part England and Portugal. He took part in 31 war actions, including the battle of Arjonilla. As a result of his participation in the famous battle of Bailén, where the invading legions of Napoleon I were defeated, San Martín was promoted to lieutenant colonel, and received a gold medal, a high honor for the distinguished soldier from the River Plate (Río de la Plata) Basin. After he became an officer of the cavalry, San Martín got involved with other young South American residents in the Iberian Peninsula, who were forging plans for the political independence of their birth places.

In 1811, he requested and obtained his discharge from the royal army, left Spain via Portugal and moved to London where he hoped his dream to return to South America would come true.

San Martín recalled this period of his life on various occasions. In 1848, he wrote: "I served in the Spanish Army, in the Iberian Peninsula, from the age of 13 to 34, obtaining the rank of lieutenant colonel in the cavalry. At a meeting of South Americans in Cadiz, we received word of the first movements taking place in Caracas, Buenos Aires, and so on. It was there and then that each one of us decided to return to our native land to offer our services to the cause of independence. Many years before, in 1819, he had written: "I was myself in the service of Spain in the year 1811 in the post of squadron leader of the Infantry Regiment of Borbón when I first received news of a general movement in both Americas. Given that the movements' prime objective was emancipation from the tyrannical government of Spain, I decided at that moment to offer

my brief services in any of the positions which were found to be inciting rebellion: I preferred to return to my native land, where I would be able to employ my knowledge in whatever has was within my reach..."

San Martín together with some other men from the River Plate area disembarked on March 9, 1812, in Buenos Aires, the capital city of the old Viceroyalty of the River Plate. His fervent desire to contribute to the independence of the South American nations prompted him to return to his birthplace. Shortly after his arrival the triumvirate government confidentially informed him that an infantry squadron was being organized. A few months later this squadron became the core of the Grenadier infantry "Regiment", which would remain as one of the most famous landmarks in the annals of the South American War of Independence. It was during this time, when he was instructing officers, cadets, corporals and soldiers in the martial arts, the handling of weapons and military discipline, that he met and married Maria de los Remedios de Escalada. On December 7, 1812 the new triumvirate government named him colonel of the new regiment.

On February 3, 1813 San Martín led 120 grenadiers to his first victory on South American soil in San Lorenzo, near the city of Rosario, Santa Fe. In this battle, he and his men defeated 250 infantrymen who had disembarked from a privateer river expedition instigated by the government of Montevideo, a city still dominated by loyalists to the Borbón king. The battle lasted only 15 minutes during which San Martín, the creole (criollo) chief almost lost his life when he was trapped under his wounded horse. In 1810, the revolutionary government created the North Army to strengthen its authority and spread the independence movement to the borders of Perú. Under the command of venerable General Manuel Belgrano, this army won two important battles, Tucumán and Salta and in 1813 entered the territory of High Perú (currently Bolivia) from where it had to retreat back to Salta after being defeated in the battles of Vilcapugio and Ayohuma. While the defeated military forces retreated to Salta to muster up troops, the government of Buenos Aires decided to help them by sending in reinforcements, under the command of Colonel San Martín. San Martín took charge of the North Army on January 29, 1814, relieving General Belgrano of his duties.

The new chief set up his quarters in Tucumán and devoted his time to reorganizing and training the Army which had been entrusted to him. In confronting these tasks, his broad military knowledge served him well. He was undertaking this important task when his failing health forced him to request and receive a leave of absence. San Martín then went to Córdoba where rest and medical care improved his health.

While in the North, San Martín became convinced that a victory over the forces of the Viceroyalty of Perú, now occupying high Peru, would not be easy. He planned to open up a second passage to the Pacific Ocean and to threaten Lima. In this way the Viceroyal troops would retreat in order to aid in the defense of the threatened Peruvian territory. Until this was to happen, the Northern Army and the border defense of High Perú were left in the charge of General Martín Miguel de Güemes and his gaucho militia.

On August 10, 1814 the Supreme Director Gervasio Antonio Posadas named San Martín -upon San Martín's request- superintendent governor of the Province of Cuyo. The twofold objective of this position was to continue his distinguished service to the motherland and to improve his weak health in that delicious climate. The governing superintendence of Cuyo, created on November 29, 1813, had jurisdiction over the provinces of Mendoza, San Juan and San Luis. As a result of this decision these regions were separated from the jurisdiction of Córdoba.

San Martín, who took office in September 1814, had been the Governor of Cuyo for two months when the independent regiment of Chile was defeated by repressive troops sent in by the Viceroy of Perú. This led the "Libertador" to rethink his plan of military action. He had to choose between two alternatives: adopt a defensive plan, should the troops of the Viceroy of Perú attack Cuyo crossing the Andes mountain range, or form an Army able to cross these mountains in order to liberate Chile, and having once accomplished this, continue on and do the same in Perú. He chose the latter, that is to say, a military action designed to guarantee the independence of the Hispanic American countries from the Borbón Monarchy and their condition as sovereign states. San Martín's continental plan was approved the government of the United Provinces of the River Plate shortly after they had declared their independence on July 9, 1816.

San Martín divided his time between serving the civil government of Cuyo and organizing the Andes Army. The basic training camp of his army was in Plumerillo, near the city of Mendoza. He traveled from one place to the other astride "a short-tailed, quick paced black horse". He was dressed, -wrote Damian Hudson- in very simple clothes since he wore "blue knitted wool pants, tight on the legs, grenadier boots, a large cloth overcoat of the same color in winter, a large jacket of the same material with gold metal buttons in summer, a silk or patent-leather bowtie and a military hat lined in oilcloth". His height was approximately (5'8") 1.70 meters but he appeared to be taller because of his rigid military-like posture. His complexion was dark, due to the natural color of his skin as well as for having spent years of service in the open air. He had a big hawk-like nose. His prominent black eyes were never still, and the look in his eyes was extremely lively. He possessed an uncommon intelligence and his knowledge went far beyond his strict professional training. He was of quiet manners and ways, which revealed a meticulous education; depending upon the moment, he was witty and informal, harsh and frugal, optimistic and a model of courage for those who were about to give in. He was extremely discreet, almost cryptic or pretensive without lying. He was profoundly reserved and warm in his affections, Mitre once said of him "he was a brilliant and penetrating observer of men; he had them carry out their functions according to their abilities".

Once the Andes Army was completed, in mid-January 1817, San Martín began his journey across the mountain range, which appeared to be impossible for a military body to pass. Among the leaders of this army was the great Chilean patriot Bernardo O'Higgins.

On February 12, in Chacabuco, having made it over the mountains, San Martín's troops defeated the Royal Army. This victory left open the road to Santiago, the capital city of the old captainship general or Chilean kingdom.

Three days later, a group of honorable men met in Santiago and named the "Libertador" to be the highest political magistrate in the country. Since San Martín declined this honor, Brigadier O'Higgins was chosen and given the title of Supreme Director in order to govern the destiny of this neighboring nation. Once having taken office, the Chilean patriot presented a proclamation to the people in which he stated that "the sons of the United Provinces of the River Plate have proclaimed their independence as a precious reward for its existence and patriotism".

As a result of the victory in Chacabuco, the town council of Santiago gave San Martín P\$10,000, as a gift. The hero refused the gift and at the same time requested that the town hall use the money to fund a national library for the people; he wrote in a note "it distinguishes the sacred rights which form the essence of free men".

The Royal Troops which still remained in the South of Chile were sent reinforcements from Perú and began an attack on Santiago. During the eve of March 19, 1818 they were able to launch a surprise attack on the Unified Army of Argentines and Chileans in Cancha Rayada. This resulted in the partial breaking up of the Unified Army. San Martín rebuilt his Army and on April 5 of the same year, triumphantly won the great battle of Maipú. The simple message that was sent that day to the Supreme Director of the United Provinces of the River Plate, Juan Martín de Pueyrredón says it all: "Nothing is left of the enemy army, they have been taken prisoners. We have seized weapons, 170 officers, all the generals, with the exception of Osorio. I expect him to be brought to me today. The action of April 5th has been very successful, in short, there are no enemies left in Chile". The victory of Maipú was very important, not only from the military point of view but also from the political one. The victory was felt throughout the entire continent, bringing hope to all nations. At the same time it caused flattering comments in the European political area.

Shortly before the end of 1818, the Congress of the United Provinces recognized the new state of Chile, whose independence had been declared at the beginning of the same year. Along with that decision, the end of the campaign led by San Martín was confirmed. He was a fighter for the freedom of nations not a ruler.

Having guaranteed the independence of Chile, San Martín organized the Liberating Army of Perú, made up of Argentines and Chileans. The expedition, which left on August 20, 1820, landed in the Bay of Paracas on the 7th of the following month. It was here that they announced to the Peruvian people that the time of their liberation had arrived. From this spot the chief from the River Plate began his campaign, entering Lima on July 10, 1821. In keeping with the modesty and austerity that always ruled his extraordinary life, he entered the city as an unknown "incognito" at night fall on this day. On the 28th day of July in the main square of Lima, Peruvian independence was proclaimed. Bearing the title of Protector of the Independence of Perú San Martín carried out government functions. Among the tasks he performed it is important to remember

the following: he created the flag, the national anthem of the new nation, founded the Public School and the National Library, to which he donated his books, freed the children of slaves born after the Declaration of Independence and abolished the tax that the indians paid. While continuing to battle against Royal forces, he formed the first Peruvian Squadron and National Army.

After meeting with General Simón Bolívar, the Liberator of the North, in July 1822 in the Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil, San Martín preferred to resign and turn over to Bolívar the leadership of the War of Independence. San Martín's resignation is regarded as one of the most admirable acts in the War of Independence.

Having returned to Lima, San Martín summoned the National Congress and resigned in September 1822. On this occasion he delivered a speech full of high principles and worthy of his heroic stature. He concluded with these words: "From this moment on, the sovereign Congress shall remain in task and the Nation shall reassume the Executive Power in all its parts". He immediately left the Congressional Hall and set off for Chile. It was there in "La Magdalena" that he was visited by a delegation of congressmen who offered him, among other titles and honors, that of Commander in Chief and the Father of free Perú. San Martín accepted these titles only as honorary positions but did not acknowledge the vast powers that these positions offered.

At dawn on the next day, September 21, 1822, the "Libertador" San Martín, halloed by the greatness of his soul, left for the Chilean port city of Valparaiso. After staying in the outskirts of Santiago in order to recover from a serious illness, he traveled to Mendoza. He arrived in this city in the early days of February 1823 and stayed there for some time in order to inquire about the political and military situation in Perú. It was there that he received the news of his wife's death, she had died in Buenos Aires on August 3. Consequently, his daughter Mercedes who had been born on August 24, 1816 in Mendoza was left an orphan of maternal affections.

On December 4, 1823, San Martín arrived in Buenos Aires and stayed at the country home of the Escalada family, located in the old district of San Jose de Flores (now Parque Patricios neighborhood) for a few days. From there he returned to the city to meet with the political authorities of the Province of Buenos Aires. He soon began to perceive a hostile attitude towards his person and that at the same time bizarre projects and attitudes were attributed to him.

He decided to move to Europe in order to give his daughter a polished scholastic education. He also hoped that this distancing would allow him to forget the unpleasant environment which had been created in Buenos Aires by a few ungrateful souls.

Father and daughter left Buenos Aires on February 10, 1824. The "Libertador", however, hoped to return soon. At least this is what he expressed in a letter written that same day, aboard the vessel *Le Bayonnais*, to his fellow compatriot Colonel Federico Brandsen: "within one hour I leave for Europe with the objective of accompanying my daughter in order to enroll her in a school there. I will do this and return to our country

within this year, or sooner should the European authorities try to take advantage of our good fortune".

During his stay in the Old World he stayed in touch with his friends in America through the mail. He spent a brief stay in London and then established permanent residence in Brussels.

While his daughter Mercedes continued her studies in Brussels, he decided to return to Buenos Aires in order to look after some personal matters, most specifically economic issues. Inspired by his belief that he would find his compatriots in peace, he boarded a ship at the end of 1828. However, while passing through Rio de Janeiro he received news of a revolutionary movement. This action, led by General Juan Lavalle (an old subordinate) and Colonel Manuel Dorrego (prior to his facing the legitimate government's firing squad) had begun in Buenos Aires on December 10, 1828. Both events, encouraged by the Unified Party, made the "Libertador" decide not to leave the ship in the Buenos Aires Capital. He decided to stay aboard the Countess of Chichester, the vessel which had brought him and landed in Montevideo instead. Delegates of General Lavalle traveled there to offer San Martín the military and political command of the Province of Buenos Aires.

After rejecting the offer, San Martín wrote a letter to the revolutionary leader in which he said, "with no other right than having been your companion in arms, allow me Sir, General, to make only one reflexion, to know: that although men generally judge the past according to true justice and the present according to interests in the situation that you find yourself in, one less victim, from your country, will serve as an unalterable relief, whatever the outcome of the situation you now find yourself in; since this satisfaction does not depend on others, but on oneself".

Following his principle not to draw his sword and fight, San Martín left Montevideo to return to Brussels on April 17. Prior to his arrival in Brussels he stopped in England and France.

Having left for the second time the land of the River Plate, the hero believed that this self-imposed ostracism was of a temporary nature. With regard to its duration, that was subordinate to the events then taking place in his homeland.

San Martín and his daughter left Brussels and moved to Paris at the end of 1830. They made their home in a humble country residence, 13 kilometers from the city. It was there that both of them were stricken with cholera, which at the time plagued many European countries. Happily they both were able to get over from this cruel illness.

On December 13, 1832, the "Libertador"'s daughter married Mariano Balcarce, a young man from Buenos Aires who resided in Europe at the time. Shortly before the wedding, San Martín wrote the following message to the mother of his future son-in-law: "The education which Mercedes received under my guidance did not intend to make her a sophisticated lady, but a tender mother and good wife. With this education and the praises that adorn your son, we must be totally convinced that these young people will

be happy, which is what I truly hope for". Soon after the hero would be a grandfather, first to Maria Mercedes and later to Josefa.

Shortly after moving to France, San Martín revealed his deep friendship with Alejandro Aguado, an old comrade in arms in Spain, who had by then become a great banker. In 1834, near the residence of A. Aguado, in a place known as Grand Bourg, San Martín acquired a comfortable homestead, where he lived with his daughter, son-in-law and granddaughters until 1848. Compatriots such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, his old subordinate the English General Guillermo Miller and Chileans and Peruvians driven by a desire to know the Liberator of their respective countries, arrived there to visit him.

The hero's lengthy ostracism did not stop him from closely following the march of his native land, as well as acting as the watch tower and custodian of South American independence.

For this reason he did not hesitate to take a position when the chief of a French fleet stationed in the South Atlantic decreed a blockage of the Buenos Aires Port and the "Litoral" and claimed it for his sovereignty. San Martín readily realized that this blockage was not caused by a conflict but was a consequence of the aggressive and unlawful attitude against the South American sovereignty.

Delicately and with dignity he offered his services to the Governor of Buenos Aires and representative of the Argentine Confederation's foreign affairs, Brigadier General Juan Manuel de Rosas. This is what he said in a letter mailed in August 1838, from Grand Bourg: "I have seen in the public papers that the French government has established a blockage against our country which is now in action: I am unaware of the effect that this measure has had, if it is war, I know that it is my duty to react as an American. Nevertheless given my present circumstances and hoping that you accept my services and in the humble spirit with which it is offered, I wait for your orders; if you believe that I can be of any help. Three days after receiving instruction I shall begin my journey to serve the country of my birth". The great Captain received word of compatriots who agreed with or supported the European aggression, hoping to obtain some personal advantage over the group who in the end might be defeated. Because of this in 1839 he wrote: "That which I cannot conceive is that there are Americans who, due to a contemptable spirit, humiliate their motherland with the foreigner and reduce her to a state worse than that suffered under the Spanish domination. Such a crime cannot be wiped off, not even by the tomb".

As time passed by a new threat made by England and France hovered over America and required the intervention of the River Plate army. San Martín having been informed of the Battle of "Vuelta de Obligado" in which Argentine soldiers confronted European invaders wrote the following to Rosas in 1846: "The participants must have seen what the Argentines are like. Given such behavior we have little choice but to act according to the rights of free men, regardless of what destiny has sent our way. As for my personal belief this could undoubtedly be a moment in our favor if all Argentines could be persuaded of the dishonor that would befall our nation should the European countries

triumph in this battle. This, in my opinion is just as important as was our emancipation from Spain".

San Martín could speak freely and with great conviction because his thoughts and actions were irrevocably united with those men who dedicated their lives, duties and fame to liberating the new nations. This is how he expressed himself in a letter written at that time to his friend, Tomas Guido: "You know that I belong to no party, no, I am wrong, I am a member of the American Party".

In 1848, as a result of growing unrest in most of France, San Martín left Grand Bourg and together with his family moved to Boulogne-Sur-Mer. He made this decision because, should the political situation worsen, it would be easier and quicker to travel to Great Britain.

On August 17, 1850 at 3:00 in the afternoon Don José de San Martín, Brigadier General of the Argentine Confederation, Captain General of the Republic of Chile and commander-in-chief of Perú and the founding father of its freedom passed away. At the time of his death his daughter Mercedes, his son-in-law Mariano Balcarce, his granddaughters, the Chilean Representative in France, Don Francisco Javier Rosales and his personal physician Dr. Jordan were at his bedside. The Chilean diplomat in communicating the sad news to his government said that the "Libertador" "ended his days peacefully as he well deserved in the arms of his grieving and virtuous family".

In 1880, the mortal remains of the Father of the Nation, were transported from France to Buenos Aires. This remains were placed in a mausoleum, which had been specially built, in the Cathedral. Symbolic figures representing Argentina, Chile and Perú make up a permanent honor guard.

It can be said that our hero had only one ambition: the freedom of America. For the sake of obtaining this objective, he sacrificed everything else. His life was glorified and attacked, but nothing could influence the direction he had laid out and unalterably followed, baffling his enemies with his temperance.

He resigned glory and used his sword with dignity and never used it to subjugate nations, leaving the people free to fully decide by themselves on their governments and governors.

Future generations, to whom San Martín left the judgement of his life and deeds, proclaimed that, as was expressed by the Peruvian author Mariano Felipe Paz Soldán, San Martín was: "the greatest of heroes, the most virtuous of public men, the most humble in his greatness and the man to whom Perú, Chile and the Argentine provinces owe their life and political being".



José de San Martín.
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